Part of the Legend: Myth-making and story-telling in *anime* and live action film

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Abstract

Many western tales have been appropriated in the *anime* genre and much has been written on the actualisation of English language fantasy and science fiction stories by Asian films makers. Recently, however, there have been a spate of live action adaptations of well-loved *anime* films and series and not all are made in Japan. The west has adapted existing *anime* films such as Ghost in the Shell with non-Asian stars to mixed critical and popular acclaim. Stories are changed in the retelling with varying levels of sophistication and success. This paper will look at examples of live action adaptations of *anime* by both western and eastern film-makers and some of the original stories, myths and legends that contribute to the canon. With the release this year of Tokyo Ghoul and Attack on Titan in 2015, and the proposed live action adaptation of the more lyrical, science fiction romance, Your Name, the 21st century is fast becoming the age of cross-cultural screen appropriation. This cross cultural, redefinition of stories and film open a new discourse, at times contentious, for exploration.

Keywords: Adaptation, *Anime*, live action film

INTRODUCTION

Arguably twenty-first century storytelling is intercultural, intermedial and intertextual, where like DNA, blocks of stories are acted on by forces recombined in a series of re-imaginings. Story-telling is a true cultural universality with original, archetypical tropes weaving throughout cultures and history and adaptation is as much about capturing what is elemental to a story and re-envision it for another audience or market. Concerns such as the viability and popularity of cross cultural adaptation require closer examination and this paper will focus on some key adaptations, including two case studies that explore the "neatly woven net of intermedial adaptations…the *manga-anime-live action film* "adaptational triangle" " (Pusztai, 2015, p. 141). Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), an important film in the canon of Western film history, spawned later versions of *manga* and an *anime* film.

Animation film companies and directors of the USA, have consistently created inspiring offerings with successfully hybridised of styles and ideas (Davis, 2016). *Big Hero 6* (2014), screened as part of the North Bellarine Film Festival in 2017, is an adaptation of a Marvel comic written by members of 'A Man of Action' collective. The comic book concept follows a band of Japanese inspired super heroes. In the film adaptation, Hiro, a scientific-minded teen, discovers Baymax, a medical robot, left behind by his late brother. Realising that there are wrongs to right, Hiro brings together a band of friends to fight injustice. Aside from the innovative, crime fighting gear created by the young protagonist, the film's success, based on reviews, is in the gentle humour and warmth of the characterisation, particularly in the relationship between Baymax and Hiro (Rotten Tomatoes, 2014). Like Dreamworks or Pixar, animated films produced by Disney are largely aimed at family entertainment following time tested story arcs and incorporating strong, emotive hooks.

North American adaptation of *anime* to live action however, has fans and critics lamenting the lack of narrative richness and depth of the originals. Some argue that straying from the storyline is the reason for box office failure and others believe it is that the live action films bring nothing new to the table or oversimplification of story lines (Lamble & Brew, 2017). These criticisms have been levelled at live action adaptations by both Japanese and American film companies. Most, *anime* has traditionally been geared at teen or adult audiences, presenting at times obscure and theoretical themes. Characters are ascribed increased dimensionality, being neither inherently good nor evil. *Kiki's Delivery Service* (2014) and *Attack on Titan* (2015) were panned by Japanese audiences and *Full Metal Alchemist* (2017) already had critics concerned about how the complexity of the created epoch and world will be translated to what is perceived as a 'dumbed down', live-action format. (Pieces of Work, 2014; Ashcraft, 2015; Collin, 2017).

In focussing on the ideas of aesthetics and image as text, story-telling and Japanese myth , this research hopes to contribute to the discourse of contemporary adaptation and to evaluate what may be required for successful adaptation across *manga*, *anime* and live action. Approaches to adaptation and adaptation theory will be reviewed and thematic concerns explored in the examples provided to draw together the efficacy to film to capture the imagination and engage the audience.

ADAPT AND SURVIVE

Adaptations and appropriations across the East and West are nothing new. Raw (2013) explores the Silk Road "an historical network of interlinking trade routes…invariably involved adaptation" (p. 1). The Silk Road has passed into metaphor with Clinton in her previous role as American Secretary of State envisaging the 'new Silk Road' as a reconnection with India, Japan and Afghanistan in areas of "trade, research and intellectual development" (p. 1). This broad example is embedded in a fiscal reality; adaptation driven by market forces, and perhaps the 'trading' of ideas is also to be viewed as an exchange of capital. JJ Abrams of *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* fame will shortly be directing a live action version of *Kimi no Na wa* (*Your Name*) (2016) directed by Makoto Shinkai. The sci fi film was both critically acclaimed and the highest

grossing *anime* movie at the box office, garnering $303 million US alone in Japan with worldwide box office earnings of $355 million. Genki Kawamura, Toho producer of the *anime*, stated that Abrams and his company Bad Robot "have captivated audiences in their masterful reinvention of known properties" (Jiji Press, 2017; Ong, 2017) and is looking forward to collaborating with Abrams and Paramount in adapting the film to live action.

Your Name follows high school students caught up in a narrative that twists both time and space. It is a nuanced story capturing love overcoming supernatural odds and surviving in past and future echo. It layers well known *anime* tropes: the exploration of gender; adolescent longings for worlds beyond reality; representation of popular culture, while also blending elements of comedy and pathos (Bradshaw, 2016; Stables, 2016). It's mix of science fiction and romantic reality, make it rife for adaptation, however does this mean it mean that *Your Name* should get the Hollywood treatment? Should the potential for earnings drive adaptation?

Adaptation has roots in the classical and critical studies of mimesis. Creation and re-creation as understood in the study of mimesis has its basis in antiquity with Plato referring to imitation as "a kind of production" (Gebauer & Wulf, 1995, p.40) creating "new connections, distinctions and orders of thought" (p. 2). The processes of mimesis are explained in more recent times where;

> The aestheticization of the world is continued in the images of the mass media, which are related mimetically to presupposed realities…images are miniaturized and accelerated in video form; they become a surrogate experience of reality. Distinctions between realities, images and fictions break down. The world becomes subject to making in images…Floods of images drown the imagination and cancel the inaccessibility and oppositionality of the Other (p. 2).

There are precedents in classical theory that take expressive and analogical approaches to adaptation i.e. studies that "emphasize analogies among the arts [that] take as their central line of inquiry the questions of what makes works of art successful or what, in the more old-fashioned language adopted by both Horace and Lessing, makes them beautiful" (Leitch, 2007, p. 5). This approach is more conducive to the critical theory of film studies, allowing for both an aesthetic and symbolic reading of adaptation rather than one that draws most upon the ideas of total fidelity and a narrow definition of mimesis (Gebauer & Wulf, 1995). What is possible here are ways for adaptations to "give concrete ideas shape (through images, music, motion) in such a way to act imaginatively on the texts they seek to adapt" (Cavallaro, 2010, p. 60).

Historically most adaptation theory is grounded in literature to screen, with a bias towards negative critique of film or television versions of canonical literature (Leitch, 2007) where "adaptations have traditionally been regarded as inferior art forms parasitically indebted to a privileged source" (Cavallaro, 2010, p.60). Venuti's (2007) *Adaptation, Translation and critique* combats this limited approach by privileging a hermeneutic rather than a communicative approach to adaptation from the novel or text;

"developments in film studies have abandoned the communicative model by considering adaptation as essentially a form of intertextuality" (p. 26). Citing Stam (2005) elements of successful adaptation - 'selection, amplification, concretization, actualization, critique, extrapolation, popularization, reaccentuation, transculturalization" (p. 45) - operate on the formal and thematic features of the text to render it filmic. These elements also act on film to film adaptation and a hermeneutic approach allows for the appreciation of what in a communicative sense ascribes second order originality to remakes.

Arguably successful adaptations substantiate a new approach by blending in aspects of the original story and atmosphere, while incorporating something novel. An interrogation of the original text is doubtless required; like the underpainting in a great masterpiece, the auteur must seek to build on what is essential. In cross cultural adaptation a hermeneutic understanding evolves through "a process of adaptation: a conscious attempt to explore and make sense of all aspects of the other. This process happens dialogically, employing critical self-reflection and an openness to new experience and ideas" (Bledsloe, 2013, p. 32). Cavallaro (2010) discusses Sander's proposition that appropriation "manifestly stretches well beyond the adoption of written texts thanks to its assimilation of "companion art forms" " (p. 36) and celebrates multiplicity by quoting Derrida; "launch things that come back to you as much as possible in as many forms as possible" (p. 37).

Myths, storytelling and transculturality are continued resources drawn on, internationally, by filmmakers in realising adaptation. Ellis (2017) in reviewing two recently published books by Japanese authors in the *Journal of American Folklore* enthuses that a recent trend of interest in Japanese folk narrative has led to "an extraordinary production of literary, artistic and cinematic works" (p. 236). This is in combination with its long history of curiosity "about parallel folk traditions in the west" (p. 236) and that by "Associating a new medium with traditional art forms has long been a strategy to transform things "foreign" into something essentially, that is historically Japanese" (Pustzai, 2015, p. 145).

In discussing Mayako Murai's *From Dog Bridegroom to Wolf Girl: Contemporary Japanese Fairy Tale Adaptations in Conversation with the West*, Ellis feels that the author focuses on Japanese adaptations of well-known western fairy tales such those by the Brothers Grimm (p. 238). The recent spate of Japanese exports, operating under the auspices of a more recent government initiative, promotes work for international markets, perhaps privileging those products that will appeal to other audiences (p. 236). This may be only a narrow reading, however, given that fairy tales and folklore are also largely steeped in archetype and hence story-lines and characters are to be found cross-culturally (Cavallaro, 2011).

Japan has a rich history in myth and story-telling; folk-tales invoked in many classical and non-classical forms. Traditional forms, taken from animist beliefs and Zen thought and philosophy, continue to influence *manga* and *anime* in the 20th and 21st centuries. The blend of myth, history and philosophy has been the basis of many *anime* films (Papp, 2010; Komel, 2016). Leaving aside simplistic 'fan service' devices, the stories are esoteric and complex with existential exposition and psychological analysis. The

themes and tropes belie the two-dimensionality of much of the visual world created and a mix of both grim and light-hearted action often exist in many *anime* films, creating a pleasant dissonance.

Famous directors such as Hayao Miyazaki and Osamu Tezuka use western content, aesthetics and narrative, creating elaborate productions that do more than just borrow from the individual source text. The stories are revisionist masterpieces, creating nuanced and enigmatic film that not only homages the source material, but brings to it thrilling, new elements. In adapting Diana Wynne Jones' fantasy novel, *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004) Miyazaki had this to say;

> I was snared in a trap by her. Her story has great reality for the female reader, but she doesn't care anything about how the world is set up … And magic without any rules… you know, it kind of loses control. But I didn't want to make a movie that explains the rules. That's just like making a video-game. So I made a film that doesn't explain the logic of the magic and everybody got lost! (Laughs) (Jolin, 2011).

Miyazaki's adaptation is set in a quasi-European land, in an alternate history of the industrial era. Sophie, a young, unassuming proprietor of a hat shop, is reluctantly drawn into a world of magic and intrigue. Sophie shows great loyalty and courage throughout and wins through obstacles and difficulties to save those that she loves. Aside from the captivating look of the film, Miyazaki has managed to create a world that takes what is enchanting in the novel i.e. a world with no rules and a contested romance, providing a film and story that fluidly moves beyond the boundaries of reality. In this way, it reflects the story-telling of both the West and East, capitalising on expanded audiences by introducing elements that are both novel and well known.

An adaptation of the ground-breaking *manga/anime Akira* (1988) written, illustrated and directed by Katsuhiro Otomo, is being floated with popular New Zealand director Taika Waititi at the helm. This adaptation by Warner Brothers has been long on project development but short on action however if Waititi is to direct he will be basing the live action on the *Manga* rather than the 1988 *anime* film (Chitwood 2017, Marston 2017). Also, he would insist on casting Asian actors for the roles of the stories teenagers; "sort of unfound, untapped talent" (Lamble & Brew, 2017; Trombore, 2017).

Set in a future, apocalyptic Tokyo, the city is dangerous and unpredictable with motorcycle gang war, rape and brutality all depicted. Like many other *manga* and *anime*, *Akira* borrows deeply from both the historical psyche of the Japanese people as well as on the traditional representation and folklore of *yokai* or monsters (Papp, 2010). Transformation and the ecstasy of violence form an integral part of the story with the teenage characters being subject and agents of both (Napier, 1996). Though action, explosions and physical mutation are prevalent these are a veneer. The power of the mysterious figure of Akira in the story, is that of destruction with the duality of renewal, echoing the primordial idea of *Mononoke* which literally translated from its *kanji* means

"all aspects of energy, the essence of all things…an expression of the primordial energy that is utmostly feared and awed" (Papp, 2010, p. 10). The story itself hints at a new beginning rather than a happy ending and it will be interesting to see how this will be treated in a Western, live action context.

GHOST IN THE CELL/SELL

Originally illustrated by Masamune Shirow in 1989, the *seinen manga* titled *Mobile Armored Riot Police* (1989) was inspired by Arthur Koestler's philosophical/psychological book of 1967, *The Ghost in the Machine* (Komel 2016). The *manga* and subsequent *anime* versions are all set in a fictional 21st century Japanese city called Niihama, where Major Motoko Kusanagi heads up a black ops unit called 'Public Security Section 9', dedicated to fighting cyber-terrorism. In this post-humanist era "people possess cyberbrains, a technology allowing an interface between the biological brain and various digital networks open to various hacking protocols" (Komel, 2016, p. 920).

The power of *anime* and *manga* is in its drawing from myth and historical symbolism in creating both image and story. The synthesis of varied sources, taken from different time frames, create storylines that are not only esoteric but cryptic and ultimately immersive. Cavallaro (2010), in analysing three *anime* films that have adapted fictional, historical novels believes they are successful due to their promotion of "temporal ambiguity…borne out by the interpenetration within their respective diegestic orchestrations of past and present…and of the protagonists' identities and their habitats" (p. 36). The 1995 *Ghost in the Shell anime* also employs these tactics thereby creating complex characters and storylines.

In the source film, with screenplay by Kazunori Itō and directed by Mamoru Oshii", many of the hallmarks of the texture and richness of Japanese culture are implicit. Animist belief is at the heart of the earlier Shinto mythology common in Japan prior to the incursion of Buddhism and later Christianity. The belief that all living things have a soul is extended to include the potential of all inanimate objects to obtain a form of consciousness and its underlying philosophy can be found in Taoist philosophy (Papp, 2010, p. 11). *Yokai* also represent moments of change and uncertainty and have been linked to "anxieties and associated with historical and social change" (p. 12) as well as giving shape to fear of becoming outcast.

Zen thought and philosophy, the influence of the wonder and terror of advancing technology, *Kaidan* (Ghost Stories) and the samurai code pervade the imagery and action. The look of the characters and the film is complex acting representationally in bringing reality and hyper-reality together. This is perfectly anticipated in the montage sequence in which Major Kusanagi is riding on a canal barge through the city. The sequence plays on the reflective surfaces of water and glass, reflecting reality while also distorting it. The Major herself is a piece of pristine technology subject to the gritty environment of the city and to her own humanity or 'ghost'. The philosophical question

that is posed dates to Plutarch and through a rich lineage to today; "does a thing remain the same if we change one by one all of its parts?" (Komel, 2016).

The cyborg as represented in *anime* also traces its routes to "Japan's deep folkloric background of highly realistic dolls, which are felt to possess or develop a sense of consciousness over time" (Ellis, 2017, p. 237). Traditional *Bunraku* puppets are revered as the embodiments of story elements; "[*Bunraku*] does not attempt to express life, but rather to capture or embody it and to make the puppets come to life" (Permanent Delegation of Japan to UNESCO 2013). In a contemporary example, the 'Silver Souls' *manga* is being given a live-action treatment with life-sized humanoid puppets as actors with an approach that "takes to the extreme a current phenomenon…in…popular culture in Japan, that of the powerful *synergy* among the various media platforms, be those textual, auditive, visual or audio-visual, analogue or digital, narrative or non-narrative" (Pusztai 2015, p. 142).

In the 'rebirth' of the major as an entity formed with the AI 'The Puppetmaster' and after the attempted annihilation of both by the state, we can see some of the "transmutability of all beings" (Papp, 2010, p. 10) that is ascribed to *yokai* via animist belief. The Major, however, also appears to contradict the desire to be safe within the strictures of civil society, unafraid of unravelling her own boundaries to morphose into something else be it *yokai* or *kami* (demi god). She is happy to relinquish her hold on being celebrated as an operative in the real world to become something new and unseen. Her desire for an entirely liminal existence is mirrored in her dives into the waters of the harbour. Public outcry against Hollywood and Western reworking of this and other *anime* has burned through social media with many fans aghast that well-loved films are being churned out as star vehicles and profit-turners. More specifically film remakes such as *Ghost in the Shell* employing Western stars and story shifts, dramatically changing the atmospheres created in the originals. Western 'White Washing' politicised discussion with well-known performers such as Constance Wu, Margaret Cho, Aziz Ansari, and George Takei, speaking 'about the damaging stereotypes inherent in Hollywood representation of racial minorities' (Caine, 2016). Actor Scarlett Johansson was at the centre of the debate as a white woman playing a Japanese character, sparking lists of Japanese actor suggestions from public and critics alike.

Johansson addressed the furore by stating that her motivation for playing the role was a feminist one and that "I certainly would never presume to play another race of a person…Diversity is important in Hollywood" (Ahsan, 2017). Johansson and other female actors have recently pitched an all-female cast to Kevin Feige, president of Marvel Studios. The ever-expanding Marvel film franchise has shown no qualms in loose adaptation of the original comic book storylines to accommodate a plethora of related films, so an all-female, superhero movie would not be out of the question (Shephard, 2017).

Some of the issue may be that Hollywood is not embracing diversity in a sustainable sense. The stories are often recycled ideas dealing with romantic love, slapstick comedy and action heroes. This would not necessarily preclude an interesting premise, however, in flattening the narrative and themes there is something that is lost in translation. It is the layering and depth inherent that create a successful *anime*; the choice of text and/or

the use of psychological and philosophical elements bring life to the two-dimensional plane of the animation.

It is debatable whether Hollywood's reliance on computer generated images (CGI) has either distracted producers away from storylines with depth and complexity or are an attempt at masking the fact that there is a dearth of ideas. Most North American productions of animation, whether 2D or 3D have simple tropes in which the good guys and the bad guys are easily distinguished. The emphasis on action rather than reflection is evident in the overuse of CGI in live action adaptations. This makes for some powerful moments on screen but may do nothing to forward the story or challenge the audience. Reverence for the originals aside, preferencing the effects over storyline and action over narrative reduces the film to formulaic product.

In adapting science fiction *anime*, live action film's reliance on image as plot driver, created a disconnection from what gave the *anime* version its power. Though the image or symbol can have potency in and of itself, it can also become too self-referential, allowing for disconnect for the audience;

> [The images or symbols] can become sensuous events lacking in reference to the real, can become simulacra and simulations; there then arise images and text without a subject…as the images become autonomous and enclosed within their own system of reference, there is no longer anything behind them to be sought for…references between mimetic and other worlds become fictional; they close themselves off intertextuality or interfiguration. (Gebauer & Wulf, 1995, p. 318).

METROPOLIS, ANDROIDS AND ANACHRONISM

Few cinephiles would be unaware of Fritz Lang's German Expressionist masterpiece *Metropolis*, a thoroughly modernist vision of the future. The silent film was made as an indictment of corporate, fascist control of the workforce and to a future that celebrated progress and productivity at the expense of humanity. Based on the original science fiction novel written by Lang's second wife Thea von Harbou, the novel and the screenplay links in esprit to works by H.G. Wells (Minden & Holger, 2002) to other later texts such as Orwell's *1984* (1949) where workers are subjugated to a life of grinding monotony, stripped of their intrinsic humanity and under state control. Set in 2026, the city-scape is split to represent a reality that is relentless and grim for the worker in the bowels of the city, a wonderland of play for the children of the elite and a fully realised industrialist dystopia; a future of extremes and segregation (Kerr, 2008).

The plot follows a Freder Federsen, only child of the city's founding father Joh Federsen, as he uncovers the flawed world that his father created. This knowledge is precipitated by a meeting with Maria, a revolutionary who fights to release the workers from their relentless toil and to champion those born into servitude (Hills, 2010). The view of the future is both dystopian and anachronistic. The 'M' machine that keeps the city functioning is a visual cypher at one point even transforming in the eyes of the

protagonist Freder into *Moloch*, a Canaanite god dedicated to child sacrifice (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2017). Running on steam, it is more metaphorical device than actual technology, a story-arc element that reflects the ideas of the nightmarish hell that the workers and the poor find themselves in. Some of the machinery and elements are said to presage the idea of the Wehrmacht of Nazi era Germany where the idea of *Volksgemeinschaft* was reappropriated by the party in establishing that workers and soldiers alike were expendable (Romer, 2013).

Clarke (2015) delves deeper into the mythology and symbolism of the story and film by analysing Levi-Strauss's interpretation of myth providing "an imaginary solution to a real contradiction" (p. 821). The central contradiction of the story is the unsatisfactory resolution represented by the supposed healing of the relationship between the heart, the head and the hands, the heart is represented in Maria/Freder, the head Joh Federsen and the lesser character of Gort the foreman in the hands. Clarke (2015) argues that it is the antimonies in the story and film that suggest alternative readings of Christian allegory or Oedipal myth of the narrative in keeping with the acceptance of "the question without answer" (p. 835). The film presents several dualities leading to varied readings;

- in the figures the destructive vamp robot *Hel* – named for the protagonist Freder's mother – and Maria, redeemer and love interest (Huyssen, 1981; Clarke, 2015),
- technology and the city as beneficent playground and murderous entity; Freder and the other young of the elite playing artfully in the gardens and the machines killing innocent workers,
- as "a synchretic mixture of the two diametrically opposed views of technology" (Huyssen, 1981, p. 224) i.e. the wonder of *Babel* and the city,
- the power of nature versus the city (Huyssen, 1981; Clarke, 2015) exemplified by the repressed spring under the city flooding the catacombs and lower levels.

These elements have made it perhaps one of the single most studied films in history, providing several avenues of inquiry. Religious allegory, mythology, nature versus nurture, gender studies, cyberpunk, Freudian analysis, political theory and history has all been explored. The film has kept its currency and interest due to these dualities and contradictions i.e. it denies a true resolution to those who would seek closure and presents a series of theses and antitheses (Clarke 2015). Lang's interest in the grander themes of religion, mythology and the representation of other led later make the post, world war one film *Harakiri* set in Japan and better known in the English-speaking world as *Madame Butterfly* (Miyao 2016). His interest in the agency of humanity in a world where outside forces such as religion and culture, maintain limitations on action and free will are once again at play here.

For *Metropolis* it is not just a case of adaptation but also of versioning. Remastered in 1984 by Georgio Moroder, the original soundtrack composed by von Harbou was replaced with a soundtrack by popular musicians of the time. The film itself was shown at 24 frames per second with "splashes of color replacing the original black-and-white photography, sound effects and many cut scenes" (Rodriguez, 2014) perhaps to heighten mood though more likely to appeal to an MTV generation. The treatment of the production was heavily criticised for the very reasons it also drew a cult following.

In 2002, with the discovery of scenes cut from the original, a digital version was released including written summaries of cut scenes and a soundtrack by Bernd Schultheis, an electronic composer of silent film scores. The producers of the film enthused that audiences could expect to see a version closest to the original film (Connolly, 2001). Earlier cuts and loss of original footage to the film were due to Universum Film-Aktien Gesellschaft (UFA) claiming that the film was overly long and complicated. Further excision of content was undertaken by American editors due to the similarities of *Hel* to the word Hell and that "the very idea of robotic love interest was ridiculous" (Makela, 2008, p. 98).

Regardless of any criticism of the film, the themes and the impressed many and in this case the adaptation moves from West to East; Tezuka's *manga*, and Rintaro's *anime*. The similarly titled works were produced quite separately over a 75-year span providing "dramatically different historical and cultural contexts" (Makela 2008, p. 92). The major elements such as the city, *maschinemensch*/robot/cyborg and the role of the state are there in each in variegated forms. These divergent contexts are created by transliteration and translation of the material and each version is inherently different, associated only very loosely in name and broad characterisation of humanity, environment and technology.

Much of the variance is due to format and culture i.e. "filmic adaptation is *automatically* different and original due to the change of medium" (Stam 2005, p.45). This works cross-medially from poem to song, painting to print or comic strip to animated cartoon. The appropriation of a work in any format is acted upon by the artist who in turn is acted upon by their society and habitus (Wulf & Gebauer 1995, Stam 2005;2005a). Freedom from the constraints of adaptive fidelity can perhaps most be seen in the construction of text as image, examples of which are graphic novels, comic books children's books and occasionally original paintings themselves. *Manga* are Japanese comics that developed from earlier formats such as senga-eiga (line-drawing) and woodblock-printing (ukiyo-e). *Manga* have been;

> a significant part of Japanese popular culture. However,
> Japanese comics do not exist in a vacuum; they are closely
> connected to Japanese history and culture, including such areas
> as politics, economy, family, religion, and gender. Therefore,
> they reflect the reality of Japanese society and the myths,
> beliefs, and fantasies that Japanese have about themselves, their
> culture, and the world. (MacWilliams, 2008, p. 26).

There are some crucial differences between the original 1920's Fritz Lang film, the Tezuka *manga*. Published as a stand-alone comic book as "Metoroporisu" in 1949 the robot at the centre of the story was re-imagined as a girl/boy with powers derived from the Sun. According to the definitive website on Tezuka for English speakers, Tezuka in English (2017) the artist was;

> extremely well-read, Tezuka would often find bits of inspiration
> here and there. After seeing a single movie still of the famous

> pre-war German film, *Metropolis* (1927) – the scene where the female robot is activated – in the film industry magazine, Cinema Quarterly [Kinema Junpou], Tezuka was drawn to the concept of artificial life …he did also swipe the title, drawn to the imagery of "big time" American cities like Chicago or New York the word conjured in his young mind.

Tezuka and Lang were inspired by the climbing and horizontally spreading skyscrapers of American cities, vertiginous, monumental and stunning. The city-scapes of both the Film and the *Manga* have also been described as reactions to anxieties of societal collapse; the former due to Germany's frail position politically and economically between the wars and the latter based on "articulations of social and political tensions in the post-war era" (Bird, 2012, p. 43)

The *manga*'s abstruse narrative may seem to simply reflect a science fiction comic employed as entertainment however myth and deeper aspects story also reside here. The fact that there were similarities at all is surprising, given that Tezuka supposedly based his vision solely on the one still (p. 43). The story has the under-title, 'The Great City in the 20th Century' and begins in the year 19XX with a scientific conference and as in Lang's film the *manga* concerns itself with the relationship of a robot to the city (Bird, 2012, p. 43). A master criminal, Duke Red, is intent in taking over the city with his army of robot henchman and fires a ray into the Sun creating cosmic radiation and chaos. A result of the cloud of radiation is the birth of Michi, a lab experiment of synthetic cells brought up as an ordinary child. Michi, however, can change gender, breathe underwater and fly. When Michi's secret is discovered he/she feels betrayed by humanity and leads a rebellion of Duke Red's robots (Bird, 2012; Makela, 2008; Tezuka in English, 2017).

Allusion to popular culture, history and traditional culture are littered throughout the *manga*; "*mitate* (metaphoric often humorous, and satirical) allusions" appear in the representation of Western figures (Makela, 2008, p. 103). References are made to the ambivalence of war time occupation i.e. the knowledge that American occupation meant an end to deprivation however also cohabiting with foreign forces that had been responsible for the country's devastation. The representation of 'other' in the Metropolis *manga* explicitly shows this tension in conflict "where the stakes are wisdom and folly, criminality and justice, violence and peace" (Bird, 2012, p.44). These themes could also be related to Lang's film where tension and conflict are not easily reconciled and where the rhetoric of a benevolent dictatorship as represented in the last scene between Gort, Joh and Freder, parallel the ambiguities in the person of Michi themselves.

The year 2001 saw the release of the *anime* version of *Metoroporisu* (2001). The screenplay was written by Katsuhiro Ôtomo and directed by Shigeyuki Hayashi, also known as Rintaro. The film borrows from the original art deco influence of Lang's film, including the iconic, monumental city-scape and Tezuka's distinctive art style in the realisation of the characters. The *anime* story incorporates some of the original *manga* characters themselves, specifically Duke Red albeit cast in a different role. The *anime* version has a 1920's, soundtrack, though it is set in the 1940's, again echoing the settings of both the *manga* and the original film.

There is an emphasis of establishing shots acting as they would in a *manga* i.e. preferencing the externality of the city's buildings to create a sense of the space that acts on the characters (Pusztai, 2015, p.148).

The storyline follows a detective and his nephew, Kenichi, as they enter the eponymous city on a case. A scientist, who is wanted for illegal trafficking of organs and for human rights abuses, is hiding in Metropolis. This same scientist has been employed by Duke Red, the city's dictator, to create a robot that will ultimately be used as a super-weapon. A mysterious, young woman Tima and Kenichi who befriends her after discovering her in the lab of the fugitive scientist, are unaware that she is in fact the robot commissioned by Duke Red. The pair become lost in the labyrinths beneath the city and while Kenichi's uncle searches for Kenichi, Duke Red searches for Tima. The climax is when Tima takes her position at the top of the Ziggurat, only to sabotage Duke Red's plan destroying the city in the process.

Technology and speculative future are two of the biggest draws in film in the 21ˢᵗ Century; 'Cyberpunk' and 'Steampunk' continue to be both an aesthetic and thematic concern in the *anime* industry and Hollywood (Bellette, 2017; Sunden, 2013; Komel, 2016; Birmingham, 2014). These two representational themes blend the anachronistic and the futuristic and reflect our times in which conflict rages around how to preserve and restore aspects of our existence while pushing out with technology into both time and space. Across all three versions these ideas are prevalent, bringing an important commonality to diverse projections.

CONCLUSION

In exploring the ideas of narrative and myth in the examples provided in this paper, we can see culture and format as an influence across intertextual and intermedial versions. Across all the film and text versions mentioned and analysed in this study, science fiction and fantasy adapt and interprets older tropes of longing, questioning, making sense of the unexplained and in turn, provide some elucidation. Predominant cultural views still shape how stories are presented to an audience who in turn will bring their own readings and understandings to the content. At the same time dominant paradigms of what narrative is have become a contested space where some are concerned that there is only so much story to go around.

In an era where we are questioning what it means to be human in a digital world and our place in national cultures are being challenged, our imaginings and reimagining's may yet give us ease and viability as a species. In the films it is the monsters or figures who are 'Other', who are most reflective of our civilisations; Hel/Maria, Tima, Michi and the Major represent a spectrum of humanity driving the stories by their actions and traits; destructive or innocent, dangerous or loyal, naïve or knowing, pensive or dynamic. Our materiality and our complex relationship to the notion of spirit, be it religious or apocryphal, continue to be examined through the lens of story.

The concerns of the 20ᵗʰ and 21ˢᵗ centuries are playing out across screens as we speculate on what is possible in branching futures in which technology, science, the

economy and globalism are the matter we are considering. Possibly our turning to fantasy, fairy tales and other fictions through film are our ways of making sense of or exploring how humanity will be situated in uncertain times. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that storytelling will always be at the heart of our humanity in that it is an essential format for making sense of our past, present and future.

By engaging in the long-standing tradition of adaptation and interpretation we may be learning about the 'Other' or simply trying to pass the time. In returning to origin myths and storytelling of our own and other cultures, perhaps we are attempting to build a better future, by showing what is dystopian while also reflecting the ideas of survival and rebirth. Arguments for all possible futures certainly exist and by creation through adaptation we learn. Whether the adaptation is deemed valid based on critical or aesthetic criteria or falls short of our longings and expectations the hybrids that are produced are still more than the sum of their parts. Failure is to be valued as much as success as long as we are willing to be a part of the continuing tale.

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